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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

NIO M 76-007

13 February 1976

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The 25th Party Congress

The 25th Party Congress is expected to reconfirm Brezhnev and the core of leaders around him in their positions and to reaffirm the basic outlines of their present policies. Shifts among second-echelon leaders, as well as some innovations in domestic programs, are possible. They could offer some clues as to how policy and the succession problem may develop in the post-Congress period.

The Leaders

Brezhnev appears secure and determined to continue in office. The policy disappointments at home and abroad over the past year and a half have not seriously damaged his status. His health and stamina have stabilized in recent months, and he is able to function effectively, albeit at a reduced pace. Rumor and speculation -- some from Soviet officials -- that Brezhnev would soon retire have abated. At the republic congresses now under way, Brezhnev is being accorded a full portion of praise and honor.

Major changes in the rest of the leadership are also unlikely. A congress is not the usual occasion for a high-level shake-up. So long as the dominant senior members of the Politburo hang together, underlings who desire a more vigorous leadership -- and a bigger role for themselves in it -- find no opening to promote change. The extremely small turnover of officials with Central Committee status who have been elected at the lower party meetings preceding the Congress suggests continued stability at the top.

The leadership is likely to make some adjustments in its membership at the secondary level. At the last congress in 1971, four leaders were advanced to full membership,

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adding to Brezhnev's support on that body. Today, RSFSR Premier Solomentsez and Leningrad party boss Romanov are among leaders who have some claim to similar promotions. Departures are also possible. Arvid Pelshe, 77 and not influential, may retire honorably. The leadership has avoided recriminations over the harvest disaster, but it still may offer up someone -- perhaps Agricultural Minister Polyansky -- as a scapegoat.

If a top leader should go, Kosygin seems to be the most likely. Periodically, reports have circulated that he would like to retire. His health has been indifferent recently. Over the years his governmental apparatus has suffered attacks and incursions from the party, including Brezhnev, and reports of criticism cropped up again in December. Moreover, he is the only top leader who has an obvious successor, First Deputy Premier Mazurov. Even so, his departure is only a possibility, not a probability.

Policies

The Congress will reaffirm the basic foreign and domestic policies pursued by the leadership since the last Congress. In his report, however, Brezhnev will have to take into account some policy disappointments. Last year's bad harvest will force him to take a more sober line on domestic prospects than on the international outlook.

Foreign Policy

There seems little reason to doubt that the 25th Congress will reconfirm the CPSU's dedication to the peace program outlined five years ago. The USSR's foreign policy line is not seriously in question, and the tone as well as the specifics of Brezhnev's report to the Congress will convey satisfaction and optimism. This will be attributed in the first instance to the growth of the USSR's military capabilities, and the increased respect which must consequently be accorded to Soviet demands throughout the world. The point will be underlined by graphic descriptions of deterioration and dissension among the capitalist states.

Brezhnev will find good things to say about disarmament. Clearly a SALT II agreement would have been a big help, but

Brezhnev will still be able to point with pride to SALT I and the other agreements that were reached with the US in 1972. He will come out for a new SALT agreement and may put in a word in favor of future reductions, while repeating his call for the banning of new weapons of mass destruction. He will probably note that MBFR negotiations have begun since the 24th Congress, and call for more rapid progress in those talks.

The treatment of the US relationship will probably be relatively sober. The problems of SALT II, MFN, credits, and Angola have helped create an atmosphere that would make it very difficult for Brezhnev, even if he were so inclined, to give a strongly positive cast to the US relationship. He will note the increasing activity of "anti-detente forces" in the US. At the same time, Brezhnev will want to signal -- particularly in a US election year -- that Soviet policy aims at getting detente with the US back on the tracks.

Brezhnev will probably be positive on Moscow's progress vis-a-vis West Europe. He can point to the Berlin quadripartite agreement, the treaty with the FRG, and expanding economic relations with Bonn, Paris, and London as concrete evidence of progress. Pride of place is likely to go to CSCE, which will be portrayed as a major achievement, despite the reservations that we know the Soviets have. Nevertheless, loss of momentum in bilateral relations with the FRG, and France, serious difficulties in managing relations with Communist Parties in Europe, and disappointment with the recent course of Portugal, will all combine to give the Western Europe part of the report a more subdued tone than would have been the case two years or even a year ago.

China may be a problem. In the past week or so Moscow has been unusually harsh in its treatment of Peking; this could be a warm-up for a blast at the congress. But there is also a possibility that the Soviets are only reacting in a tactical way to what has been coming out of Peking since the unusually tough People's Daily editorial on New Year's Day. At the 24th Congress, Brezhnev treated China with remarkable forbearance, given the fact that the border fighting was less than two years away. One argument in favor of such

an approach this year is the recent leadership changes in Peking. The Soviets are not optimistic, but they might strike a moderate pose so as either to encourage "pro-Soviet" elements in China or, at least, to avoid giving additional ammunition to Moscow's enemies there.

Brezhnev will probably emphasize Moscow's support for the "struggle against imperialism" and for national liberation movements. Communist successes in Vietnam and Angola will be prominent, not only because they are "successes," but because Brezhnev will be seeking to underline the point that detente has not prevented the Soviet Union from carrying out its international socialist duty. He may also lean forward in this area in order to breathe life into the idea that the Soviet Union does have a leadership role in the world communist movement. In the back of his mind, or that of his report's drafters, is the increased schismatic tendencies among the West European parties. By emphasizing those cases where the Soviet Union can lay claim to having exercised leadership, he will be reinforcing his call for international solidarity behind Moscow's lead.

The Economy

Most of Brezhnev's ambitious plans to put his stamp on the country's future at this Congress will come to naught. A long-term economic plan (1976-90) and a new constitution, which he promised for the Congress, are evidently far from ready. His rather vague calls for a comprehensive rationalization of agricultural and industrial management have generated little response.

The leadership will try to gloss over present economic difficulties and to retain the verbal commitment to a consumer program that has for the time being lost much of its substance. Quality and efficiency will be stressed over quantitative growth. Besides calling for more discipline and socialist competition, Brezhnev may be tempted to launch some modest management reorganization proposals for agriculture or industry to create a more convincing image of initiative in these areas. Possibly the goals for agricultural inputs will be revised upwards. In the ideological sphere, he will convey the message that detente and the CSCE agreements do not mean a slackening of the ideological struggle or of internal discipline.

The Succession Problem

Although Brezhnev will remain at the helm, the Congress proceedings may give some indication that the leadership is beginning to address the problem of succession. Brezhnev has so far made no moves to establish a long-term successor, and most present candidates lack a good claim to his mantle. Shifts among junior leaders -- for example, enhancing party secretary Kulakov's status or bringing Ukrainian party chief Shcherbitsky to Moscow -- could signal that succession maneuvering has begun and suggest who might be a front-runner.

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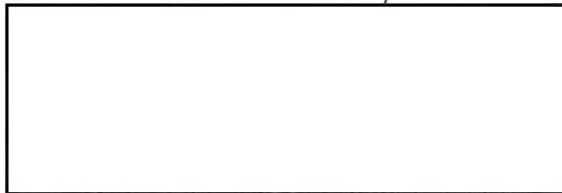
13 February 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director

SUBJECT : The 25th Party Congress

This memorandum was requested by the NSC Staff to give the President some background about the Soviet Party Congress which opens on 24 February. OCI did the drafting. We will allow a few days for the NSC Staff to deal with it and then put it into the National Intelligence Daily.

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National Intelligence Officer
for USSR-EE

Attachment
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